

# AWE

ALTERNATIVES WITH  
EDUCATION



*Breaking the cycle of crime—jail—more crime—more jail: This is what AWE is all about.*

## FOCUS: DETERMINATION

“We’re beginning something new, starting this week.”

Roderick, the young inmate tutor, looked intently at the other inmates in the GED program to whom he spoke. Since 2005, Alternatives With Education had provided the GED program at Potosi Correctional Center after it was cut by the state. We had recruited inmates, like Roderick, as tutors. And Roderick had recruited students, like many of the men seated around the cinderblock classroom. They waited expectantly, wondering what he was going to suggest. I knew what was coming, having discussed it with Roderick earlier. I was uncertain.

“From now on,” Roderick continued, “you are going to read a book a week and write a book report.”

“A whole book?” asked an older man, frowning.

“Yes, and I want you to write a book report, too. You know how important it is to get an education. If you want to improve your reading, you have to read. You need determination.”

I waited for the general grumbling, but there was little. I wondered if there would have been more negative reaction had I suggested the book-a-week plan. Hearing Roderick’s plan earlier, I had suggested that he ask for a book a *month*. He had looked at me with his dark eyes. “You know they have time, Sister Barbara. You know they have time.”

Roderick had come to prison at age 15, certified as an adult. An angry young man, he was looking at a possible 30 year sentence. After serving five years, however, Roderick started to change. He began attending whatever classes were available, among them AWE’s Meditation and Achieving Your Potential programs. After taking the classes, he began to co-facilitate some of them and initiate new ones. Knowing how he had been helped, he wanted to make sure there were programs for other prisoners so they could use their time well, address issues that brought them to prison, and take responsibility for their crimes and behavior. Roderick taught other prisoners communication skills; he knew himself how fear of public speaking plagued him and lowered his self esteem. His determination and skill soon won the respect of prison officials who encouraged him to do more program facilitation for other offenders. In doing so, Roderick became an excellent role model for others, especially the younger men. A GED tutor, he inspired many young men to enroll in the program.

Roderick served as a very effective teacher and tutor in AWE’s GED program. Many students did what he asked, whether it was reading that weekly book or writing a book report. He expected the best of himself and helped other men to see they could do the same.

Several months after Roderick began the reading program, he received good news. Because of his good behavior and the growth he showed, Roderick was granted an early release. I was happy for him, but sorry to see him go. What an influence he had been on others!

His determination served him well on the outside, too. After release, he was readily hired by a relative. He was helped by an imam. He kept himself busy with additional part time jobs like lawn care.

Three years since his release, Roderick has made a successful transition and re-established himself. Most recently, he has been working with youth, trying to help them avoid the path he went down.

Roderick’s transformation shows how education can offer people in prison a viable alternative to their previous lives. Transformed people influence others. Transformed people have a greater chance of contributing to their communities and not returning to prison. Your contribution to Alternatives With Education makes this transformation possible.

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